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CENTURIO ROMANUS—"A FIRST-CLASS FIGHTIN' MAN"¹

Several years ago, while I was conducting some graduate students through the writings of the Immortal Julius—immortal still, although "dead and turned to clay"—, one of them remarked, "Those Roman centurions must have been pretty fine fellows", and another added, "They certainly show up well in the New Testament". Ever since that time I have been hoping to find out, some day, just what sort of a man the Roman centurion actually was, and how far the documentary evidence would support the students' estimate of him.

It is not my purpose in this paper to discuss the centurion *qua* centurion and to describe the mechanical relation which this very important cog had to that wonderful engine which subdued the world—the Roman army. What I am trying to do is to get a sort of composite picture of the man himself, as he appeared to his contemporaries and to his associates.

As a background to the picture, however, it may be well to quote a part of the chapter in which Polybius enumerates the characteristics a centurion was expected to have (6.24). I shall use the quaint translation of James Hampton (Oxford, 1823).

...In the choice of these captains not those that are the boldest and most enterprising are esteemed the best; but those rather, who are steady and sedate; prudent in conduct, and skilful in command. Nor is it so much required that they should be at all times eager to begin the combat, and throw themselves precipitately into action; as that, when they are pressed, or even conquered by a superior force, they should still maintain their ground, and rather die than desert their station.

It is, doubtless, hardly necessary, but it may be interesting, to remind you of the evidence supporting my student's opinion of the centurion as he appears in the New Testament, especially when we bear in mind that this evidence comes from witnesses who, on racial grounds, were unlikely to be prejudiced in his favor.

There is the centurion at Capernaum whose story is told by Matthew (8.5-13) and by Luke (7.1-10)—the centurion whose servant was sick, a "servant who was dear unto him..." Doubtful, perhaps, whether a Jewish Rabbi would care to meet him personally, he sends the Elders to Jesus with his appeal and they testify for him "...That he was worthy...For he loveth our nation and hath built us a synagogue..." We note his quiet sense of discipline and authority, his courteous humility, with no trace of servility, his calm certainty that orders given by one who had the

right to give them would be obeyed. Matthew writes (8, 10, 13):

...When Jesus heard *it*, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel... as thou hast believed, *so* be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.

There was the centurion who stood upon Calvary², watching the crucifixion, who saw more and deeper than had Jewish priests or Roman governors. Note his utterances: "Truly this was the Son of God". "...he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man".

At Caesarea, Cornelius³, of the Italian band, was "A devout *man*, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway...", "...a just *man*...", and of good report among all the nation of the Jews..." His conversion to Christianity completed the conversion of Peter, and convinced both him and the Church at Jerusalem that to the Gentiles also had been granted "repentance unto life".

In Acts, Chapters 22-24, reference is made to the centurions who protected Paul at Jerusalem, helped to thwart the plot to assassinate him, and commanded the party that guarded him on the way to Caesarea, and to the centurion at the latter place who, under orders from Felix, kept Paul, but let him have liberty.

Our liking and admiration are won by Julian⁴, of Augustus's band, who had charge of the soldiers on the ship of Adramyttium which started for Italy with Paul and his fellow-prisoners, in A. D. 62. We can understand and forgive his one natural mistake, when he preferred to take the advice of the master of the ship concerning the voyage and the weather, rather than that of a landsman preacher, under arrest for disturbing the peace. It required both broadmindedness and skill in the reading of character for him to reverse his former estimate, and to pick out and trust the one man on the vessel who really knew what he was talking about, even though that man was his prisoner. It took courage as well as sympathy for him to risk his own career and his very life when he saved Paul by forbidding the soldiers to carry out their plan to prevent the escape of the prisoners by killing them, when the ship was wrecked. It proves that he must have been a good deal of a man, in more ways than one, that he brought his charges safely to Italy, after all, in spite of the wreck and the stay in Melita.

So far as the account given by the Biblical writers is concerned, there is not a stain upon the record of *centurio Romanus*.

¹This paper was read at the Twenty-first Annual Meeting of The Classical Association of the Atlantic States, held at The George Washington University, Washington, D. C., May 6-7, 1927.

²Matthew 27.54; Luke 23.47.

³Acts 10.1-48, 11.1-18.

⁴Acts 27. 1-44, 28.1-16.

The same statement can be made concerning the thirteen references to *centurio Romanus* found in the writings of Josephus, beginning with the taking of the Temple by Pompey, in 63 B. C., when, of the three officers who first went through the breach in the wall, two were the centurions Furius and Fabius⁵.

Of these references I can take time to quote two only.

In describing the fall of Jotapata in Galilee, which was surrendered by him to Vespasian after a siege of 47 days, in 67 A.D., Josephus says (The Jewish War 3.7.35. I use Whiston's translation):

... And the Romans might have boasted that the conclusion of that siege was without blood <on their side>, if there had not been a centurion, Antonius, who was slain at the taking of the city. His death was occasioned by the following treachery: for there was one of those that fled into the caverns, which were a great number, who desired that this Antonius would reach him his right hand for his security, and would assure him that he would preserve him, and give him his assistance in getting up out of the cavern; accordingly he incautiously reached him his right hand, when the other prevented him, and stabbed him under his loins with a spear and killed him immediately.

The other also comes from The Jewish War (6.1.8). The Jews, after losing the Tower of Antonia, repel the Roman attempt to take the Temple by storm:

But there was one Julian, a centurion, that came from Bithynia; a man he was of great reputation, whom I had formerly seen in that war, and one of the highest fame, both for his skill in war, his strength of body, and the courage of his soul. This man, seeing the Romans giving ground, and in a sad condition, (for he stood by Titus at the Tower of Antonia,) leaped out, and of himself alone put the Jews to flight when they were already conquerors, and made them retire as far as the corner of the inner court of the Temple: from him the multitude fled away in crowds, as supposing that neither his strength nor his violent attacks could be those of a mere man. Accordingly he rushed through the midst of the Jews, as they were dispersed all abroad, and killed those that he caught. Nor, indeed was there any sight that appeared more wonderful in the eyes of Caesar, or more terrible to others than this. However, he was himself pursued by fate, which it was not possible that he who was but a mortal man should escape; for as he had shoes all full of sharp and thick nails, as had every one of the other soldiers, so when he ran on the pavement of the temple, he slipped, and fell down upon his back with a very great noise, which was made by his armour. This made those that were running away to turn back; whereupon those Romans that were in the Tower of Antonia set up a great shout, as if they were in fear for the man. But the Jews got about him in crowds, and struck at him with their spears and with their swords on all sides. Now he received a great many of the strokes of these iron weapons upon his shield, and often attempted to get up again, but was thrown down by those that struck at him; yet did he, as he lay along stab many of them with his sword. Nor was he soon killed, as being covered with his helmet and his breast-plate in all those parts of his body where he might be mortally wounded; he also pulled his neck close to his body, till all his other limbs were shattered, and nobody durst come to defend him, and then he yielded to his fate. Now Caesar was deeply affected on account of this man of so great fortitude, and especially as he was killed in the sight of so many people; he was desirous himself to come to his assistance, but the place would

not give him leave, while such as could have done it were too much terrified to attempt it. Thus, when Julian had struggled with death a great while, and had let but few of those that had given him his mortal wound go off unhurt, he had at last his throat cut, though not without some difficulty; and left behind him a great fame, not only among the Romans and with Caesar himself, but among his enemies also; then did the Jews catch up his dead body, and put the Romans to flight again and shut them up in the Tower of Antonia.

If my discussion were limited merely to a demonstration of the *courage* of the Roman centurion, I should be able to complete my specific task and prove my case as quickly as Cicero did in his defence of the poet Archias. Therefore, like him, I shall extend my subject over a wider field.

A typical, as well as a most important figure, who might be regarded as summing up in himself many of the best qualities of the class, is Lucius Virginius, the father of poor little Virginia, who 'held an honorable rank among the centurions at Algidum, a man of exemplary good conduct both at home and in the service', the man who started the popular revolt whereby the tyranny of the Decemvirs was overthrown and the Roman Republic was restored.

As Livy tells the story (3.44-58), Virginius comes into the picture only as a well-esteemed officer of his grade, with a record sufficiently good for his superiors to grant him leave of absence promptly, when he asked for it, but not conspicuous enough to have caused them to hesitate in refusing it, if the order of Appius had reached camp a little sooner. Read Livy's narrative for yourselves, and observe how the fine qualities of the man come out, under dreadful stress, until at the last we find him modestly leaving the consulship to others, but with his ability and fitness for leadership causing him to be the first man chosen for the reestablished office of Tribune of the People. Listen to him when, as the prosecutor of Appius Claudius, he presses the case against his enemy with relentless sternness, and yet seeks revenge for his personal wrongs in a strictly legal way, and for the Republic's sake rather than for his own. See him at the end when, with unexpected clemency, he himself remits the death sentence that has been pronounced upon Marcus Claudius, who had carried out the tyrant's orders by claiming the girl as his slave, and allows the wretch to save his life by going into voluntary exile. Says Livy, as he ends the story (3.58.11), 'and the shade of Virginia, more fortunate after death than when living, after having roamed through so many families in quest of vengeance, at length rested in peace, no guilty person being left unpunished'.

One thing to which I would call particular attention in Livy's record is the oratorical ability he ascribes to this centurion. Although the speeches, as we have them in Chapters 47, 48, 50, 51 and 56, are, of course, Livy's, he would hardly have ventured to put them into the mouth of a centurion had they been so out of character as to have seemed ridiculously impossible. We may compare the speech of Sextus Tullius, 'for the seventh time first centurion of a legion', recorded in Livy 7.13. In spite of the fact that Persius (3.77-87)

⁵Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.4.4; *The Jewish War* 1.7.4.

satirizes 'one of the rank brood of centurions' for his ridicule of philosophy and learning, the Roman centurion was no ignoramus and no illiterate. Even Martial, in one of his epigrams (11.3.1-5), boasts thus:

'It is not the idle people of the city only that delight in my Muse, nor is it alone to listless ears that these verses are addressed, but my book is thumbed among Getic frosts, near martial standards, by the stern centurion; and even Britain is said to sing my verses'.

Such a soldier at his frontier post, seeking relief from the discomforts of winter quarters by reading poetry, reminds me of the scene in Bret Harte's *The Outcasts of Poker Flat*, when the members of the party that has been snowed in and is grimly awaiting death seek temporary solace by hearing one of their number recite what he remembers of Pope's translation of the *Iliad*—, even though he does persist in calling 'the swift-footed Achilles' "Ashheels". Silius Italicus (12.393-402) asserts that the poet Ennius was serving as a centurion in the army in Sardinia when he attracted the favorable notice of Marcus Cato and won from him the invitation to accompany him to Rome.

Our study is going to give us, I hope, a real picture. Therefore it will not consist entirely of high lights. There must be shadows too. It was a genuine portrait our centurion etched upon the pages of history with his own sword and a tongue mordant *Italo aceto*. Like Kipling's Thomas Atkins he would probably have asserted "We aren't no thin red 'eroes" (unless "red" was intended as a translation of *cruentus*), but I fear we could not always prove concerning him "Tommy's" other claim "nor we aren't no blackguards too". There were centurions, undoubtedly many of them, who would have been boon companions of that "Captain bold of Halifax", whose record (unexpurgated) Professor Basil L. Gildersleeve was fond of quoting to illustrate the rhythm and the associations of iambic trimeter. A man of that sort was the officer serving under Gnaeus Manlius Vulso in Galatia, in 189 B.C., whose crime and punishment were deemed of sufficient importance to be described by Livy (38.24), Valerius Maximus (6.1, Ext. 2), and Florus (2.11). Having been appointed to guard Chiomara, the captured wife of Ortiagon, one of the princes of the country, he was attracted both by her beauty and by her wealth; 'he possessed', Livy cynically interpolates, 'the lust and the avarice usual among military men'. He first tried to win her over by persuasion, then by offers of money; finally, having been indignantly repulsed, he resorted to violence. After that, he sought to soothe her fiery anger as well as enrich himself by promising to let her escape for a talent of gold. Pretending to consent to the arrangement, she got word to her friends; under cover of darkness, he smuggled her through the lines to a place where two of her people were to meet them. While he was engaged in verifying the weight of the gold, the lady gave an order to the two Galatians in their own language and their quickly drawn swords suddenly avenged her wrong. When she reached home and the prince hastened forth to welcome her, she threw on the ground before him the severed head which she had been carrying under her cloak, and re-

fused to let him embrace her until he had heard all that had happened. Her husband, as chivalrous and as just as Collatinus, regarded her chastity as still unmarred; and she, with greater courage and truer wisdom than Lucretia displayed, did not add her own death to the grief of those who loved her, but, unashamed, faced her past and her future. Livy adds: 'She maintained to the last, it is said, by the purity and strictness of the rest of her life, the glory of this achievement, so honorable to her sex'.

I might mention other instances of similar character, such as the bitterly exaggerated complaint made by a delegation of Locrians against 'every one of your centurions and soldiers' for violence and lust (Livy 29.17), or the refusal of the plebeian tribunes to interpose in behalf of Gaius Cornelius, on the ground of his fine war record, when he had been convicted of debauchery (Valerius Maximus 6.1.10), or the mention by Pliny, in one of his Letters (6.31.4-6), of the centurion whom Trajan cashiered for adultery with the wife of a military tribune.

But, after all, the noteworthy thing is that there are really so few cases of this sort recorded—less than a dozen, all told, out of some five hundred references to centurions which I have collected.

I am not good at mathematics; hence I shall not attempt to state in definite figures the result of the following calculation. But, when we remember that our record of these men covers something like a thousand years, starting with the time when, according to Plutarch (Romulus 8), the supporters of Romulus entered Alba 'divided into companies each of one hundred men, every captain carrying a small bundle of grass and shrubs tied to a pole', and multiply that number by the average number of legions in service, per year, and that by the sixty centurions there were in each legion, we can see that the total of individuals is going to be pretty large. I have found the names of more than fifty of them definitely stated in the pages of Greek and Latin literature. The fact that we have so little real evidence against their morals is all the more significant when we note that our witnesses include Juvenal, the man with the ingrowing grouch, whose misanthropy was surpassed only by his misogyny, Suetonius, whose nose for scandal would have insured him a job on any modern yellow newspaper, Persius, the puritanical moralist, and Martial, the professional purveyor of obscenity and advertiser of damaged characters.

Being human, these soldiers sometimes made mistakes, and not often with as fortunate consequences as in the case recorded by Aelius Lampridius in the *Life of Heliogabalus* (Scriptores Historiae Augustae 17.16.2-3). When the Emperor, in a low tone of voice, gave orders for the death of Sabinus, friend of the jurist Ulpian, the centurion, being slightly deaf, understood him to say banishment, and so permitted his prisoner to escape from the city.

Seneca (Dialogues 2.18.4) tells how a *primipilaris* was punished because he ventured to address the Emperor Caligula by that old army nickname (*Caligula*) instead of by his official title.

At least once, the course of European history was definitely influenced by a centurion's dereliction. This was when the officer sent by Cassius, after the first day's battle at Philippi⁶, to ascertain how Brutus had fared, meeting the messengers of Brutus on their way to report success, thought that his commander would believe that no news was good news and hence dawdled along with his friends from the other camp instead of bringing back his report at once. Cassius, interpreting the delay as evidence of disaster, committed suicide, and so what had been really a drawn battle resulted in the ultimate defeat and death of Brutus also, and in the end of the last hope of restoring the Republic.

Livy (25.19) relates how Marcus Centenius Paenula, 'distinguished among the centurions of the first rank because of the size of his person and his courage', conceived the idea that he was the one man who could save Rome by defeating Hannibal, and, having persuaded the Senate also, received an army; when he put his theory to the test against the great Carthaginian, he lost his own life and nearly fifteen thousand men besides.

Disloyalty may sometimes be largely a question of which end of the telescope one looks through. Caesar (B.C.1.20) probably did not regard as traitors the men who joined with the tribunes and soldiers, at Corfinium, in turning Domitius Ahenobarbus over to him and in surrendering the town; nor (B.C.1.74-77), those officers of Afranius, in Spain, who visited his camp, during an unofficial truce, to fraternize with their former comrades and pay their respects to Caesar, some of them deciding to remain with his army and being rewarded by him for doing it.

But there were a few cases more obviously culpable, such as that of Titus Salienus, mutinous centurion of the Fifth Legion (*Bellum Africum* 28), who 'had besieged the house of Marcus Messala, Caesar's lieutenant, at Messana, and in his presence made use of very seditious language', and the cases mentioned in Livy 7.12 of those who mingled with the common soldiers and stirred up disaffection against the dictator, and of those in Dio 48.42: 'many, including one who was serving in the *primus pilus*', who were punished by Calvinus, in Spain, for desertion.

Some of the other bad qualities that appear in certain individuals, as shown by evidence which I cannot take time to quote here, were murder (Asconius on Cicero, *Oratio in Toga Candida* 17); graft⁷; conspiracy (Cicero, *Cat.* 1.3, 5); cowardice (Caesar, *B.G.*1.39); inability to control troops and handle a difficult situation properly, in spite of personal courage (Caesar, *B.G.*6.37-40); false witness (Appian, *B.C.*2.47); rudeness and coarseness (Persius 3.77-87, 5.189-191)⁸; harshness (Seneca, *De Clementia* 16); cruelty (Appian, *B.C.*4.17)⁹. The

fact that the centurion was so often employed as an executioner of sentences of greater or less degree is to be regarded as rather his misfortune than his fault, but he sometimes went about it in a way which indicated that he rather enjoyed the job. An example is Lucilius (Tacitus, *Annales* 1.23), who received the nickname "Cedo Alteram", 'Give me another (stick)', 'because when he had broken one rod upon the back of a soldier he used to call out loudly for another and yet another' (he was killed by the soldiers in retaliation, when they got a chance at him).

In performing his frequently brutal work, the centurion sometimes showed a certain grim humor. Appian gives several instances of this. When Trebonius was arrested (B.C.3.26), he asked that he be allowed to go to Dolabella's presence: 'One of the centurions answered him facetiously, "Go where you please, but you must leave your head behind here, for we are ordered to bring your head, not yourself"'. With these words the centurion immediately cut off his head'. Thuranius, a former praetor (B.C.4.18), had a scapegrace son, who was a friend of Mark Antony. When the old man was proscribed, he asked the centurions who were about to kill him to postpone the execution until his son could appeal to Antony for him. The officers replied, with a laugh, 'He has already appealed, but it was on the opposite side'. A man, having seen his brother arrested (B.C.4.22) and not knowing that he himself had also been proscribed, ran up with the request that he be permitted to die for the prisoner. The centurion pretended to think that the man had said 'before' instead of 'for', and, glancing at his proscription list, said 'Your request is a proper one, for your name comes before his'. 'And so saying', continues Appian, 'he killed both of them in due order'.

Occasionally, to be sure, the victim was the one who jested. Seneca, in his essay on 'Peace of Mind' (*Dialogues* 9.14.6-7), tells how Julius Kanus was playing at draughts with a fellow-prisoner when the centurion came to lead him to execution. Kanus calmly counted the men on the board and said, 'Mind you do not tell a lie after my death, and say that you won'; then, turning to the centurion, he added, 'You will bear me witness that I am one man ahead of him'.

Sometimes the joke was on the centurion himself. Cicero (*De Oratore* 2.67), referring to the Younger Africanus as a famous ironical jester, relates the following story. A centurion, having been degraded by him for absence from battle, claimed that he should not be disgraced for merely remaining behind to keep watch of the camp. 'I', retorted Africanus, 'do not like people who are *too* watchful'.

Having now given the prosecution ample opportunity to present its case, we may properly listen to the evidence for the defence. There is plenty of it. As an offset to the unfavorable counts already specified, I may offer a partial list of good qualities summarized as follows. The Roman centurion was alert and clever and had good judgment; he was brave, dependable, highly esteemed by his superiors and his comrades, a good disciplinarian, usually loyal and obedient, often

⁶Dio Cassius 47.46. A somewhat different version is given by Valerius Maximus 9.9.2.

⁷See Excursus on Chapter I of R. O. Jolliffe's dissertation on Phases of Corruption in Roman Administration in the Last Half-Century of the Roman Republic. This work was reviewed in THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY 14.118-120.

⁸We may draw our own conclusions as to why a certain centurion, mentioned by Tacitus, *Annales* 1.23, bore the nickname *Sirpicens*, 'Asafetida'.

⁹*Ibid.* 19.

merciful, a good man to send on important missions, and usually noted for physical strength and size.

The reference to physical strength and size at once calls to mind Cicero's words (Cato Maior 33), *Ne vos quidem T. Ponti centurionis vires habetis*, and Horace's expression (Sermones 1.6.72-73), *magni pueri magnis e centurionibus orti*, a passage which always makes me think of Coles Phillips's drawings: a few broken lines, a few touches of color, and yet the hints are so sufficient and so true that our own imagination unconsciously supplies the missing links so that we seem to see a complete picture. There are the boys on their way to School, satchels and notebooks on arm; Horace, short and chubby, rosy-cheeked and quick-tempered, the son of a small farmer who had been a slave; and the husky lads from the garrison families, who, being Romans and sons of officers, felt, and were not slow to express, scorn for their social and physical inferiors. There must have been some lively times when young Quintus let his temper run away with his discretion, as it did on certain later occasions, too; and it is easy to guess what happened to him at the hands of those *magni pueri*, before the days when his *stilus* had become a terror to evil-doers, and he could claim *Mae-cenas atavis edite regibus as et praesidium et dulce decus*.

Our chief difficulty in handling the case for the defence is in the abundance of the material. We might almost ask a verdict on the ground of mere preponderance of evidence. Out of a total of nearly 500 references to centurions which I have thus far collected, there are less than fifty which can fairly be counted on the unfavorable side.

In this connection, I would remark in passing that the size of the above total is not so surprising. Caesar, Livy, and Tacitus furnish more than 270 items. The really noteworthy feature lies in the length of the list of authors, which includes thirty-two names, and in the unexpected places in which some of the examples turn up.

Fortunately, this audience is already so well acquainted with the reputation of the men whose characters are being judged that it is not necessary to introduce in detail the evidence which is in their favor. It might be enough to rest our case upon the summary I have already given, with the assurance that I could furnish proofs for each of the points claimed. However, I shall give a few samples out of the embarrassment of riches, partly for the purpose of making clear what I mean by some of the headings I used above.

Cleverness and good judgment are illustrated by the following passages: Appian, B.C.4.19: the centurion Herennius¹⁰ Laena, who had been sent to arrest Cicero, seeing the slaves of the latter mustering for their master's protection, led them to believe that he had a larger force with him by shouting, 'Centurions in the rear, to the front!'; Livy 7.12-14: Sextus Tullius, First Centurion, acts as spokesman for a group of disaffected soldiers, in order to prevent them from becoming dangerous by choosing some really disloyal officer as their leader, and helps the dictator Gaius Sulpicius in

correcting the abuses and ending the mutiny; Florus 2.26: Cornidius, while serving under Marcus Crassus in Moesia, frightens the barbarians away by fastening a flaming torch on his helmet; Livy 30.4: centurions disguised as slaves accompany Laelius as spies, when he visits the camp of Syphax before Utica. To this Frontinus (Strategemata 1.1.3, 1.2.1) adds the details that one of them, fearing that he had been recognized by a Numidian, allowed himself to be scourged as evidence of his servile character, and that, in order to get an excuse for inspecting the intrenchments of the enemy, they all pretended to lose a horse, and chased him all around the lines; Livy 26.4: Quintus Navius, centurion of the Sixth Legion, suggests the combination of *velites* with cavalry whereby the Campanian cavalry were beaten before Capua. This is also mentioned by Valerius Maximus (2.3.3) and Frontinus (Strategemata 4.7.29). In Livy 26.5 another brilliant achievement of the same man is recorded.

The following may serve as samples of occasions when centurions were chosen for important and difficult missions: Appian, B.C.2.35: Caesar entrusts to centurions and a few picked soldiers the surprise and capture of Ariminum; Appian, B.C.3.88: in B.C. 43 Octavian sends centurions to lay before the Senate his claims for appointment as consul; Caesar, B.G.2.7: in the country of the Nervii Caesar sends centurions ahead with the scouts to choose a place for his camp; Livy 24.48: Publius and Gnaeus Scipio send three centurions as ambassadors to win over Syphax, King of the Numidians. They succeed, and one of them, Quintus Statorius, at Syphax's request, remains behind to organize and drill the Numidian army.

The estimation in which these men were held by their comrades, by their superiors, and by the public is shown by the frequency with which they were chosen by the soldiers to be their spokesmen, as when they present the appeal of the army to Caesar at Avaricum (Caesar, B.G.7.17); by Antony's care to have his special guard of 6,000 men made up entirely of picked centurions (Appian, B.C.3.5); by Cicero's description of the character of Gaius Nasidienus (who 'led the eighth first line': *octavum principem duxit*), in a letter to Brutus (Ad Brutum 1.8.2); and by Pliny's giving to the daughter of one of them a letter of introduction (Epp. 10.107) to the Emperor Trajan, who responded (10.108) by granting to the lady 'the freedom of the city of Rome'. I have listed some sixty examples of this sort.

An extremely heavy burden of proof would, obviously, rest upon any one who attempted to dispute the personal courage of men who rose from the ranks through grade after grade of promotion to the Chief Centurionship of a Legion, especially before a jury who remember such names as appear on Caesar's roll of honor, Publius Sextius Baculus (B.G.2.25.1, 3.5.2, 6.38.1), the chivalrous rivals Titus Pullo and Lucius Vorenus (B.G.5.44)¹¹; Lucius Fabius, of the Eighth Legion, who died in fulfilling his promise to be the first to mount the walls of Gergovia (B.G.7.47, 7.50);

¹⁰Compare Plutarch, Cicero 48.

¹¹Compare Caesar, B.C.3.67.5.

Crastinus, former *primipilus* of the Old Tenth Legion, who, serving at the battle of Pharsalus, threw the first javelin (Florus 4.2.46), and, having promised Caesar, 'I shall act in such a manner to-day that you will feel grateful to me living or dead', died in 'making good' (Caesar, B.C.3.91, 92, 99)¹². Appian (B.C.2.82), in summing up that day's work, says, 'Such was the result of the famous battle of Pharsalus. Caesar himself carried off the palm for first and second place by common consent, and with him the Tenth Legion. The third place is taken by the centurion Crastinus'.

Perhaps I may select as a typical figure Cassius Scaeva, to whom Valerius Maximus (3.2.23) devotes almost two pages of rhetorical Latin. Lucan (6.138-262) gives to him 125 lines of even more rhetorical poetry. Cicero (Ad Atticum 13.23.3), however, refers to him much more curtly as likely to be 'hard-boiled' in money matters (*ibid.* 14.10.2).

Here is what Caesar says of him in B.C.3.53.4-5, when he is ending his account of the near-disaster at Dyrrachium:

'...and in the shield of the centurion Scaeva, which was brought to him, were found 120 holes. In reward for this man's services both to himself and to the public, Caesar presented to him 200,000 pieces of copper money, and declared him promoted from the eighth to the first centurion. For it appeared that the fort had been in a great measure saved by his exertions....'

Suetonius (Julius 68) adds that he also lost an eye in this battle and was wounded in thigh and shoulder.

There have been *tribuni* and *legati* and *imperatores*, as there have been majors and colonels and generals, whose names stand out large on the page of history. But, after all, as one reads the long, long story of that marvellous army which went through the world of its time tramping, terrifying, triumphing, inexorable, almost invincible, *cui neque fervidus aestus...neque hiems, ignis, mare, ferrum, nil obstat*, he cannot help feeling that the man whose work was most important day in and day out, year in and year out, war in and war out, the man who trained the *tirones* into what they needed to be and made them do what they needed to do, the man who transformed the newly conscripted or oddly assorted *legiones* into the obedient, dependable, efficient *exercitus*, was the Roman Centurion.

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY CHARLES S. SMITH

REVIEW

Nicomachus of Gerasa, Introduction to Arithmetic.

Translated into English by Martin Luther D'Ooge, With Studies in Greek Arithmetic by Frank Eggleston Robbins and Louis Charles Karpinski. New York: The Macmillan Company (1926). Pp. ix + 318.

Well has Professor Robbins said in beginning Chapter V of the work here under review, "History has been most unkind to Nicomachus of Gerasa..." As with Euclid, Apollonius, Diophantus, and numerous other Greek mathematicians of lesser fame, substantially nothing is known of Nicomachus's life. He stands out

as a scholar without a history and almost as a man without a country. If, however, he still exists in the spirit and is conscious of the world of to-day, he must take just pride in the monument so lately raised to his honor in this translation of his work, published in the University of Michigan Studies, Humanistic Series, Volume XVI.

Nicomachus was one of the Neo-Pythagoreans who sought to revive the studies and the culture of the ancient brotherhood. He was a native of Gerasa, a city which is generally conceded at present to be the modern Jerash, some fifty-six miles northeast of Jerusalem. Gerasa seems to have had in his day a considerable Greek colony, and hence it was natural that Neo-Pythagorean ideas should there find a sympathetic reception.

The statement that "History has been most unkind to Nicomachus..." however, finds also a parallel in the case of various other mathematicians of his race. While we know almost nothing of his life and are somewhat uncertain of his birthplace and even of the time in which he lived (probably about 100 A.D.), we are equally ignorant of the lives of Euclid, Diophantus, and Heron of Alexandria, and we know almost nothing of Apollonius and of such minor scholars as Antiphan, Bryson, Dicaearchus, Autolycus, Nicomedes, Theon of Smyrna, and Pappus. Until modern times, indeed, history has been looked upon more as a record of ruling dynasties and their conquests than as a record of human achievements in science, in art, or in establishing the rights and the culture of men.

Greek mathematics developed as all sciences develop, at first in details that seemed disconnected. One man exploited a certain set and his fellow found interest in another. Thus we find even to-day that one man will spend years upon foundation principles, another upon projective geometry, and another upon the theory of numbers. In due time there arises a genius in exposition, and so Alexandria produced Euclid and Diophantus, Perga produced Apollonius, and Gerasa produced Nicomachus. Euclid showed his genius in assembling and logically arranging the discoveries of his predecessors in the three major lines of elementary geometry, theory of numbers, and optics; Apollonius, in the single line of conic sections; Heron, in mensuration (besides his work on physics); Ptolemy, in astronomy; and Nicomachus, in number theory. Each was a pioneer in the exposition of a large amount of accumulated theory, and each contributed more to human progress than most of the discoverers of the single details which were used in giving to the world a text upon the subject.

Nicomachus wrote in Greek—*Εἰσαγωγή Ἀριθμητική*. This work seems to have been translated into Latin by Apuleius (c. 175), but the Latin work is lost. It formed the basis of the arithmetic of Boethius (c. 500) and thus of the study of number theory for a thousand years thereafter. Of the early commentaries that of Joannes Philoponus of Alexandria (John the Grammarian, a Christian philosopher, c. 525), was the best. The standard text of Nicomachus is that of Richard

¹²Compare Plutarch, Pompey 71, Caesar 44; Lucan 7.471-475.

Hoche (Leipzig, Teubner, 1866). The work consists of a study of the properties of numbers, and includes polygonal numbers, the proportions, and perfect numbers (of these Nicomachus knew four—6, 28, 496, and 8128). Like all the ancient *arithmetica*, it had nothing to do with computation.

To produce a satisfactory translation of any work is linguistically much more difficult than to write *de novo* a book of the same length; for this reason most translations are labored productions, style being sacrificed to literal accuracy. Jowetts are not often born and are less often discovered. The work of the late Professor D'Ooge, however, is exceptional. He has taken a book that would be expected to appeal to but few readers and has rendered it into English that reads as smoothly as the Greek in which it was written, and which, by its very simplicity of style, will attract many besides mathematicians. Moreover, a comparison of various critical passages shows that he has given the mathematical meaning with unusual clearness. He has, in short, made a rare combination of style with accuracy of translation. The final polishing of the manuscript of Professor D'Ooge was the work of Professor Robbins, and it has left nothing to be desired.

When it comes to the chapters written by the editors there is naturally abundant opportunity for debate. Professor Robbins has done a very commendable piece of work in Chapter II (16-45: The Development of the Greek Arithmetic before Nicomachus), in Chapters V-IX (71-137: on the life, works, philosophy, and translators of Nicomachus), and in Chapters XI and XII (146-177: on the manuscripts, text, and language of the treatise). Linguistically he is well adapted to such studies. Certain of his historical statements, however, are open to question. For example, the assertion (20) that "By the time of Philolaus, therefore, we may assume that the *ars arithmetica* was practically complete in all its essentials" will quite assuredly be challenged. Since the traditions referred to are those recorded by writers who lived from five to seven centuries after Philolaus, their value is not so great as to justify this assumption. Indeed, if we go back to the fragments of Speusippus, who lived about a century after Philolaus, we find merely a slight reference to polygonal numbers and to odd, even, and even-odd numbers. Archytas, who lived after Philolaus, gives little evidence of any elaborate knowledge of proportion, a subject which had to wait a generation longer before Eudoxus developed the general theory which Euclid seems to have adopted. Philolaus apparently had no knowledge of 'perfect' numbers or of their relatives, the 'over-perfect' and 'defective' numbers. There is no evidence that he knew the gnomons (as number series), the oblong numbers, or any of the theory of proportion. The attenuated relation of Philolaus to prime numbers, through the fragments of Speusippus, does not encourage the belief that Philolaus knew anything about them.

On the whole, however, Professor Robbins's essay (Chapter II: 16-45) on The Development of the Greek Arithmetic before Nicomachus, is a masterly piece of

work, and particularly in its parallel arrangement of the topics treated by Theon of Smyrna and Nicomachus. A similarly excellent study is the Summary of Iamblichus's Commentary (127) and the list of omissions of Nicomachus made by Boethius (134).

The best piece of work done by Professor Karpinski is a similar comparison (138-140) in parallel columns of the treatises of Capella, Isidorus, and Cassiodorus.

The fact that the book contains the work of Nicomachus, in translation by Professor D'Ooge, and also several chapters by Professors Robbins and Karpinski, accounts for the great difference in style and in accuracy of statement.

A few extracts will serve to illustrate the fact that certain portions of the work are not up to the standard of the rest¹. For example, the name of the translator of the Scholium on Plato, Charmides 163 E, is not given (3-4); but, whoever he was, he certainly used poor English when he wrote: "It treats, then, on the one hand, that which Archimedes called 'The Cattle Problem'..." The statement (5), "...In this field <mathematics> the Oriental science served primarily as a directive force, determining the topics which for centuries occupied the attention of Greek mathematicians", will stimulate the reader's desire to know of a single instance in which Oriental mathematics had even the slightest influence upon Greek geometry, algebra, or theory of numbers.

The statement (6) that the abacus "was in *wide use*² among the ancient Greeks..." is one for which many readers would be glad to see even a trace of proof. Certainly the scanty references quoted are not authority for any such assertion, and references in other Greek works to the extensive use of counters are practically non-existent.

The statement (10-11) that "The most notable advance in astronomy in Babylon was undoubtedly made during the period in which the science was making real progress in Greece..." raises a question in chronology. The real progress of astronomy in Greece may be said to begin with Aristarchus (c. 270 B.C.) and to end with Ptolemy (c. 150 A.D.). Just what "notable advance" was made in Babylon at that time? Even the Chaldean Empire, to which the statement probably refers, fell more than two centuries before Aristarchus flourished, and what scintilla of evidence is there of any "notable advance" after that time?

Then, too, there is the statement (11) that "The decad, which is prominent in the Pythagorean arithmetic, also receives, in a way, particular attention in the Ahmes papyrus, for 10 appears over and over again in the problems of the Egyptian manual". Of course it does, and also in every arithmetic ever printed—not with any Pythagorean mysticism, but because it is now the universal base of counting in the civilized world. That there is any Pythagorean teach-

¹Professor Karpinski contributed to the work the following parts: Chapter I, The Sources of Greek Mathematics (3-15); Chapter III, The Mathematical Content of the Greek Mathematics (so the Table of Contents; the page headings of the chapter, 46-65, give "Arithmetica"); Chapter IV, Greek Arithmetical Notation (66-70), and Section 1 of Part III, Extensions of a Theorem of Nicomachus (289-290). C. K. >.

²The italics are mine.

ing of the 'sacred tetractys' in the Ahmes papyrus is nowhere observable.

With respect to the words (15) "The purpose of this introduction is to show the Oriental inspiration and origin of many of the Greek developments in mathematics...", we may remark that the statement is doubtless true, but it is equally true that the purpose is not achieved. Aside from the observation of the stars (but only slightly from their mathematical study), neither written history nor any available source material gives any warrant for the statement as to "many³ of the Greek developments..." If there is a "mass of self-supporting evidence" (15) to this effect, why is not at least one supporting statement given? If Babylon had exerted any influence upon the mathematics of Greece, it would have been in the transmission of those tables of which we now have such a considerable number—tables first made known in Europe by the Senkereh tablets containing squares and cubes; but in all the mathematical literature of pre-Christian Greece there is not the slightest evidence of such influence. Here was a subject relating to numbers, one in which both Babylon and Athens were interested, and yet we have in Greek literature no reference to it whatever, and even the significant tables of Nicomachus have no resemblance to any of Oriental origin.

It would be an easy matter to add to this list of errors of fact and probable errors of judgment, but to do so would be to seem to detract from the translation and from the many excellent features of the accompanying text. Suffice it to say that most of the work is an honor to American scholarship and literary ability.

DAVID EUGENE SMITH

HORACE, CARMINA 1. 34. 5-8

Horace, in Carmina 1. 34. 5-8, explains—or professes to explain—why he has become again a regular *cultor deorum*:

namque Diespiter,
igni corusco nubila dividens
plerumque, per purum tonantis
egit equos volucremque currum.

In The Classical Journal 21. 628 (May, 1926), I gave a clipping from the Springfield Republican of June 5, 1925, to illustrate Horace's reference to lightning from a clear sky. I give here a passage that appeared in the Literary Digest, April 9, 1927:

³Again the italics are mine.

"A bolt from the blue" has become a proverbial expression for some happening which is unexpected and unusual. Lightning really may strike the ground from a clear sky, without the usual trappings of thunder clouds and storms overhead, we are told by Dr. E. E. Free's *Week's Science* (New York). He says:

"A note of this possibility in *The Monthly Weather Review* for last August has elicited from Mr. H. J. Upham, of Panama City, Florida, the statement that this occurrence is not infrequent in his city, a statement which the United States Weather Bureau publishes in the current issue of its official periodical. The secret is, Mr. Upham makes clear, that squalls forming or passing at a little distance, but not directly overhead, may generate quantities of electricity and cause lightning.

Some of these flashes, instead of passing directly downward, may strike in a slanting direction, so that they reach the ground in advance of the storm's position or alongside it, thus producing a bolt of lightning from a sky which remains blue and almost cloudless."

BROWN UNIVERSITY

RUSSEL M. GEER

VERGIL, AENEID 4. 449

In THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY 21.113-114, Professor Arthur L. Keith has an interesting article on the reference of *lacrimae* in Vergil, Aeneid 4.449.

I venture to suggest another interpretation which seems to fit the circumstances and which has the additional advantage of absolving Vergil of the charge of carelessness. Why need we limit the reference of *lacrimae*? The situation must necessarily have been acutely painful to all three of the persons concerned; was it not inevitable that all three should show signs of distress? Aeneas was about to leave Carthage; he *must* do so, at whatever cost of suffering to himself, to Dido, and to Anna. His purpose was unwavering, and, for that very reason, these interviews, with their futile prolonging of the agony, were heartrending to all three. Vergil, with affecting simplicity, sums up the situation in three words, which = 'Tears flow, but without avail'.

It may be added that Vergil was running true to form in summing up a highly emotional episode in an unforgettable half line¹.

HIGH SCHOOL,
HENDERSONVILLE, N. C.

T. W. VALENTINE

¹<I find myself unable to accept Mr. Valentine's view. I may quote my note [1928 edition] on *curam...premebat*, 4. 332: "Aeneas conceals his pain, preferring to let Dido believe him unfeeling..." In Book 4 Vergil does not stress Aeneas's suffering. C. K.>

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